

The Clipper Visits...

Bob Gately

BY JANE LANE



Bob Gately

Bob Gately is at the top of his game. Literally. And no one, with the exception of his wife, Donna, and 2 sons, Sean, 5, and Chris, 2, is more grateful for this time at the top.

After 15 years as a news producer at WBZ-TV and a 2-year stint as a writer at Hill, Holiday, Bob decided it was time to spring from the corporate world and look at life from his own perspective. With his network contacts and a new MBA in hand, Bob returned to his career of choice -- TV production. The Gately Group, headquartered in Duxbury, was thus born.

That was 4 years ago. Although the company took off and is by all measures a success, it's been a rollercoaster ride on the personal side. About mid-May of this year, Bob started experiencing severe headaches, the kind that's strong enough to complain about. Donna, a nurse, instinctively knew this was something to check out and so he did. He figured he was in trouble when physicians at South Shore Hospital instructed him to go to Massachusetts General for more tests. There it was, what he and everyone fears every time a splitting headache interferes with your normal routine. At 39 years-old, Bob had a brain tumor and a fairly good-sized one at that. He was in surgery 5 days after the diagnosis.

Before his operation, as he lay in a hospital bed, his doctors explained the long months of therapy that would follow -- that is, if he even survived the operation. Bob thought, "of course I'm going to survive, but what about my contract with the Patriots." The Gately Group, as fate would have it, had just won a contract

with the Kraft family to produce 2 of the 4 New England Patriots pre-season games this fall. If he couldn't walk or talk, how was he going to handle the pressure of producing live network television?

Now, a mere 3 months after the operation, Bob is a testimony to remarkable, if not miraculous, recoveries. Not only did he not need any type of therapy, he was home from the hospital in 5 days and walking around his Forest St. neighborhood within a week. And he's already produced one of those pre-season games. "A near-flawless production" as Bob described it. Chalk that one up as a victory over the Dallas Cowboys and a major win over his fears that not only his career, but his life might be seriously shortchanged.

"My doctors are very pleased with my progress, but frankly, it's a wait and see thing," he said. "But so far, everything is fine and it hasn't impeded my work at all."

The Patriots-Cowboys game wasn't even his first production after the operation. That was a corporate film he produced for John Hancock. By the first of July, he was aboard a plane for a trip to Atlanta to videotape a company event. This was, according to the entrepreneur, this first test of endurance since the operation. "It was a long plane ride and an all-day shoot. It was the most complex thing I had done since the operation. And I felt fine," he said. Relieved that he has passed his first self-imposed trial, Bob eagerly embraced the work that would surround the Patriots production. And the Krafts couldn't have been more pleased that Bob was up to the task.

"I was awarded the contract in the first place because they wanted to give it to a local company. They were familiar with my work and they knew I would bring in the best in the business to work on the games." The Krafts were supportive and concerned throughout Bob's stay in the hospital. They are, he added, a "first-rate family and they run a first-rate operation." In turn, Bob supplies them with a first-class production.

Producing a live NFL game is no simple, connect-the-dot task. It's more seat-of-the-pants with a lot of finesse and tons of preparation before anyone puts one foot on that football field. The preparation part is where Bob begins as he maps out where cameras will be located -- and he brings in more than most other network broadcasts. He also brings in state-of-the-art editing equipment which enabled his 45-member staff to create some pretty fancy player profile updates throughout the game. It's part of the package he provides, knowing that New England fans expect to see all the action on the field along with bites of information about their favorite AFL champions.

His next Patriots production will be tomorrow night at Veterans Stadium in Philadelphia. Same crew, same equipment, different city.

As production coordinator, Bob "shapes the look and feel of the broadcast." On game day, he's the point person, making sure his vision is followed through with the assistance of his associate producer and staff. "I

tend to take a hands-on approach," he explained, "from selecting the music you hear in the background, to overseeing the graphic design, to discussing how many cameras we'll use and where they should be. During the game I spend the entire time in the remote truck conducting the entire operation."

Bob brings years of frontline experience to his production company to which he may now add the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. To serve as associate director for the NBC prime-time telecasts of the summer Olympics could be viewed as the pinnacle of a career, or just another peak. Bob prefers to regard it as one more mountain he successfully scaled. And boy, was it fun.

"Nothing can beat that. I mean, the Olympics are it in the world of sports. Nothing is higher than that -- even the Superbowl or the World Series. It just doesn't get any bigger," he said. And although Bob describes it as a "once in a lifetime experience" he's actually been a part of the NBC Olympics production crew 3 times.

Bob stayed in Atlanta for about 6 weeks, preparing during the day for the all-night broadcasts and then assisting with the nightly marathon production effort. In the end, he said with a slight hint of humility, the ratings "went through the roof" and he's now "looking forward to the opportunity to work with NBC in Sydney, Australia" for the summer games in 2000.

He describes his function in Atlanta to that of a traffic cop, coordinating the tasks of everyone behind the scenes. He was the lead cop telling the guys at the swimming events that they would be switching to them in 10 seconds. He would count down the seconds as the cameras and commentators would simultaneously switch to the swimming. Same process, night after night, competition after competition -- from the track field to the pool to the gym.

"It was a great 6 weeks because I was working with the best in the business, including Dick Ebersol and Bob Costas," he recalled.

The infamous bombing at Centennial Park did not affect the telecasts, Bob said, because it occurred after that night's broadcast. However, the event "changed things dramatically for days later," he said, explaining that because the Olympics are a huge international event, there are constant warnings about bomb threats. When the park bomb detonated, causing relatively little damage and, with the exception of one death, minor injuries, it was "a little bit of relief" for the millions of visitors and workers who strolled about the area fearing a catastrophic event. "After the bomb, there was a sense of relief and it was relatively calm," he recalled. If asked to travel to Sydney to repeat his Olympic performance, Bob would not hesitate. "Truthfully, if you get asked to go it's not the sort of thing you say no to."

With the prospect of NBC broadcasting the next 10 years of Olympics -- except for the Japanese winter games -- they'll be plenty of future opportunities for this man who just weeks ago figured that future may never arrive.